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An Examination of the Chicago Dilemma: By Implication, the Remainder of the Country

By

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www.chicagocrimecommission.org

As the earlier article stated: “Police brass, facing horrible homicide numbers, at last, see front-line response”, says: *“Cops have told the Chicago Sun-Times they’ve been afraid to make investigatory stops because the Justice Department and American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois have been busy scrutinizing police practices after the release of the McDonald video.”*

“The huge slowdown in police activity this year could be a factor in the rise of violent crime in Chicago.”

The headlines do not convey the depth of the existing issues and appear to place sole responsibility for police officer lack of engagement in reducing homicides. Discerning minds can see the oxymoron of those statements, as a problem of this magnitude cannot be resolved by police alone. There is a myriad of others who have a shared role in finding solutions. The next paragraphs examine this in more depth. We want police to stop crime, but, then we do not! Not if their encounter with violent resistance requires an equal level of push back to avoid being hurt or killed. I need to note here, that I do not condone police violence that extends beyond the reasonable and necessary levels to do their job. Dealing with unreasonable people removes the rules of fair play for all rational reasons.

Crime and violence start with the perpetrator as responsibility cannot be transferred when someone pulls the trigger, and another is killed. Broadly speaking, there are those who create laws and requisite penalties; there are governmental officials who control programs and funding, and those who must engage with the community to address social issues. Others, at a secondary level of civil services, include police, courts, and many other public/private stakeholders. When murder reaches epidemic levels, it is easy and convenient to blame the police. Sadly, this is an expedient excuse by others who have failed to adequately engage with their communities of interest to identify

sustainable solutions. A participating and engaged partnership at all levels is necessary, and when some are absent, a breakdown occurs.

As with all public issues, there are layers of direct and positional people who also share in the planning, administration, policy development, funding and other controlling actions, many above and equivalent to the designated Police Chief. Comments about police are often myopic and one-sided, not so subtly placing the burden of a political liability as a police only responsibility. That path ignores all people and services that share the role of assuring a community's quality of life.

Public and private stakeholders, elected officials and those they appoint are no less responsible for carrying out their duties. Other mutually symbiotic and parallel functions include police, fire, EMS, code enforcement, and neighborhood development - government services that are mutually co-dependent. Add the legislative rule-making, the justice system consisting of the prosecutor, judge, probation and parole, corrections, domestic violence programs, victim services and others and the list is substantial. We additionally have many private endeavor groups representing volunteers, neighborhood leaders, and organizations embodying many different services. Still, further out from the center of a circle are provider groups that include social services, health care, substance abuse control, food, housing, counseling, job-seeking help and the list goes on depending on the place. One common issue is they do not interact at a level sufficient to attain sustainable solutions.

Before the occurrence of an incident, some events lead to that moment. Every event has previous episodes. We all too often start at the finish line, which is too late, too little, and inadequate. Many are aware and see what is occurring, but the "head in the sand" model seldom results in successful reduction and prevention. To target a single group, the police, without examination of the responsibility and accountability of others who are linked in multiple ways to the same emerging problem, are inexcusable. No governmental function should ease into the shadows when the heat is being felt. The time to act was earlier in the unfolding timeline when the conditions clearly pointed toward elevated pressure and disharmony.

Community members also share responsibility. People who occupy an identifiable community position are socially answerable as well. Lack of collaboration among agencies leads to inefficiency and ineffectiveness, fails to resolve persistent problems, and often fails to achieve improvement of people's lives. Only through a willingness to work collaboratively, to share information, to coordinate response and to engage with the community, can positive change occur?



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Hurling invectives offers no value in solving persistent problems. Engaging in an assessment process and problem-solving model leads to sustainable solutions and makes sense. Looking at Chicago, we have many diverse groups casting blame, forming dysfunctional coalitions, making hasty decisions, firing people and seemingly do not address the right issues. Blame is not appropriate as all aspects of the community, individuals, groups, related government agencies and others carry responsibility; regardless of those who seek to remain separated. The discussion in the article alluded to above, is how to get the police to resume intercepting criminality, removing guns, and preventing homicides. The resistance by police is understandable if we put ourselves in their shoes and realize the seeming goal is to spotlight police and ignore all else that contributes to the same discussion about violence. It is not one-sided!

Is there sufficient community engagement to assist in determining sustainable solutions? Why are gangs not mentioned as part of the problem? What were the reactive motivations of the District Attorney that took place before completion of an investigation? The Mayor, dodging incoming and settling on firing the Superintendent was cloaking his lack of involvement early on. Where were the Mayor, Superintendent, and elected officials before all the chaos became media attention? Surely the Superintendent kept the Mayor, and Council apprised of what was happening; or did they just remain silent?

It seems ludicrous to place sole blame on the police for their interaction with criminal and disruptive elements of society. The issues are much larger than a single agency can resolve. Asked to engage and then micromanage their every action, while remaining at arm's length, is not support and thus, the distrustful behavior of the police. Stand with them that changes the scenario; it puts more people and minds on the front line and allows for a broader engagement of the best proportions.

It becomes too easy to blame others from the sidelines, not so if engaged. The current approach seems unlikely to work, given the difficulty of getting all parties to the table, to participate in appropriate problem solving. Yes, change is needed, but it will require a massive in-depth examination of conditions and include a broad stakeholder partnership, to establish and meet mission and goals.

Change will not take place in a vacuum! Examination, fact finding, analysis and a clear picture of events, causes, contributing factors, and other data is the starting point. Good decisions do not emerge from wishful thinking, they are based in *knowledge, critical thinking, examination and facts __ for other processes are generally "quick fix" and quickly evaporate allowing old conditions return.*

Some Explanation of Police Behavior.

Police lag behind in reducing the effects of accumulated stress, adversity and trauma (ASAT) that emerges from an officer's daily encounter with society's complications. The list of stress and trauma causation factors include a confrontation with violent people, death, the threat of and actual physical harm, and the result of human deviance and the list goes on. The belief that police officers are immune to the effects of stress and trauma is erroneous. It is not a weakness, as tradition exemplifies an entrenched belief system. The public may encounter one such incident in a lifetime; our police confront them daily. Similar to the military, civilian combat may manifest itself in PTSD symptoms, which the military address in a much deeper way.

Police agencies provide protective gear to lessen physical harm, so too must we stipulate appropriate programs to mitigate the adverse effects of psychological, emotional and resulting physiological damage to our officers. The goal is the well-being and balanced lifestyle of our police; for they regularly engage with the deviance and dysfunction of society's darker side. What we are witnessing from the article's description, is a circling of the wagons for mutual protection. Given the elected official's insinuations, without a sustainable solutions approach, a reduction in police action is understandable.

Police attention to accumulated stress, adversity and trauma are inadequate. Has this not been ignored long enough? When we seek to determine which police and sheriff agencies have resilience building training programs in place, we find that they are in the minority. To my way of thinking, this has to change. We ask our police to engage in addressing social dysfunction that few others in society encounter. Moreover, then, when the sheer weight of social chaos is realized, the repetitive and devastating nature of negative behavior emerges, we say, "It is the fault of our police!" Wrong, there are separate issues that coincide, but we seem to cast off any depth of the examination. Shame on us.

Note: For in-depth examination with recommended solutions, please see, "The Silent Killer of Police and First Responders: Building Endurance to Manage the Effects of Accumulated Stress, Adversity & Trauma. Amazon.com. 184 pages. ISBN-10: 1492114618. By Richard C. Lumb, Ph.D.